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ABSTRACT

This paper presents information from a study in which researchers examined the implementation of local professional development committees in the state of Ohio. Ohio is one of two states that requires teachers to participate in a peer review of their professional development goals. This study examined the Individual Professional Development Plans (IPDPs) of 133 teachers in 5 Ohio school districts, most of whom taught elementary school. The study focused on the areas of literacy and mathematics. Results indicated that, while 13 different types of activities were chosen, teachers still selected traditional college coursework and inservice workshops and conferences as the main sources of professional development. The fourth most frequently selected professional development activity, in-class activities, indicated that teachers were viewing activities that they conducted within the confines of their own classrooms as professional development activities. Districts varied widely in how they approached the newly defined professional development. Since the IPDPs of most teachers were very vague, it was difficult to discern much about the specific types of learning teachers were pursuing in literacy and mathematics. (Contains 10 references.) (SM)

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Individual Professional Development Plans: In Search of Learning for Teaching

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Abstract

This study is a continuing study of a 1999 qualitative study in which the researchers examined the implementation of Local Professional Development Committees in the state of Ohio. As a descriptive study, this present study examined the Individual Professional Development Plans (IPDP) of 133 teachers, 115 of whom were Elementary Teachers. Resultant data indicated that, while thirteen different types of activities were chosen, teachers still selected the traditional course work and inservice workshops and conferences as the main sources of professional development. The fourth most frequently selected professional development activity, which the authors categorized as In-Class Activities, indicated that teachers were viewing activities being conducted within the confines of their own classrooms as professional development activities. Recommendations were made for ways to make professional development more meaningful for both educators and for the attaining the goals of their respective school districts.

Individual Professional Development Plans

In Search of Learning for Teaching

Few would argue that better prepared teachers results in better schools and higher achievement for students. Also, most would agree that tantamount to better prepared teachers is effective professional development. While we have known for a very long time that accountability, follow-up, and long-range planning are critical ingredients for effective professional development, we have not yet come close to making effective and long-lasting professional development for teachers a reality (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Guskey & Sparks, 1991; Hirsh & Ponder, 1991; Lieberman, 1995). There is a movement afoot, however, to help teachers redefine true professional development. Several states require teachers to be more specialized in their pursuit of professional development; two states, Ohio and Wisconsin, require their teachers to participate in a peer review of their professional development goals. These plans are evaluated for the relationship of the plans to school goals and student needs. The states of Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and South Carolina now require teachers to be more specialized and more focused on school improvement (Boser, 2000). While several states are attempting to change the way professional development is defined, the purpose of this paper is to discuss the types of professional development teachers in Ohio are selecting for their personal professional development goals. Specifically, we will discuss two aspects of this program: one, the history of Ohio's implementation of these requirements; and, two, how 133 teachers in five Ohio school districts are approaching the newly mandated professional development.

In 1996, Ohio legislators authorized the establishment of Local Professional Development Committees (LPDCs). The purpose of the LPDCs was twofold: one, to focus the responsibility for renewing certificates/ licenses from the state to local school districts and agencies; two, to develop a legal structure that provided educators with "the freedom to shape their own professional development" (Ohio Department of Education, 1998). Therefore, the purpose of this research was to expand on our original research in which we examined how six different school districts implemented these Local Professional Development Committees that were to be set in place in the Fall of 1998 (O'Connor & Herrelko, 1999). In the present study, we examined the Individual Professional Development Plans (IPDPs) to determine if any patterns emerged as to the types of professional development that teachers were seeking. We also sought to determine if teachers were engaging in the type of professional development that is related to the pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986) that researchers and theorists have maintained is needed. Specifically, we chose to analyze the IPDPs at two academic levels: all elementary level teachers and secondary teachers in the content areas of Literacy and Mathematics. We examined the areas of Literacy and Mathematics because these two areas represent our areas of specialty.

In the rest of this section, we present the script of a Reader's Theater presentation in order to introduce the problem we have researched. Readers' Theater mimics the presentation format of the ancient Greek theatre (Dixon, Davies & Politano, 1996). Choruses of voices contribute the dialogue and remain on the stage while other chorus groups present. Our use of this technique is to express the frustrations and excitement held by teachers when they discuss professional development. Following the Readers Theater example will be a description of our methodology, results, and discussion.

Scene One: The Way We Were

#1 Art Teacher (whining): I don't wanna go to Friday's in-service. It looks like a huge waste of time.

#2 Math Teacher (agreeing): I know! I've already used all the software programs they'll be talking about.

#3 Science Teacher: Why can't we have in-service programs that are relevant. I'd really like to know more about the new Science Standards.

#4 Complacent Teacher: Suits me fine. I'll pick up the rest of my continuing education units and get some papers graded.

#2 Math Teacher: And you'll probably get the paper read, front to back, too.

#1 Art Teacher: You know, there's this art teacher over in another district doing some neat things. I wish I could visit that teacher and get continuing education units for that!

#2 Math Teacher: Yeah, me too! I was offered an externship at a bank last summer. Lots of the stuff I'd be doing relates directly to the Stats class I teach. Now why couldn't I do that and let that count?

#3 Science Teacher: And have you heard about this National Board Stuff? It sounds like something I'd be interested in doing but, Whew! Talk about a ton of work! I don't know if it's worth it. Wouldn't it be great if you could get credit for something like that?

#4 Complacent Teacher: I don't want things to change . . . I like getting credit just for showing up and for taking a course in Industrial Arts, even though I'm a Biology Teacher. You should see how nice my boat is lookin'!

Scene Two: Gone With the Wind

#1 Researcher: The one-shot, one size fits all approach to professional development has been ineffective for such a long time.

#2 Another Researcher: What everyone wants for students, a variety of learning opportunities, seems to be ignored when it comes to the professional development of teachers.

#3 Researcher: Professional development must now be looked at differently. The teacher must be viewed more significantly as a learner, and . . .

#1: Researcher: It needs to be looked at more as a career-long process. Also, reflection, and how it impacts student learning, is a critical component.

#4: Someone in Ohio: We, at the Ohio Department of Education, agree! We have even passed a bill in Ohio which requires teachers to complete Individual Professional Development Plans.

#1: Researcher: What does this plan look like?

#4: Someone in Ohio: What it looks like depends on the Local Professional Development Committee. In theory, however, the Ippy Dippy permits teachers to explore a wide variety of learning opportunities.

#2: Researcher: What kinds of opportunities?

#4: Someone in Ohio: Grant writing, national board certification, school visits, supervising student teachers, inquiry, action research . . . the sky's the limit as long as the teacher's goals are relevant to the needs of the district, the school, the students, and the teacher.

Scene Three: Back to the Future

#1: Art Teacher: Have you filled out your Ippy Dippy yet?

#2: Math Teacher: Not yet, I'm still trying to decide if I'm going to try for National Board Certification or not.

#3: Science Teacher: Wow, if you do that you'll be set for the next five years. I think I'm going to count my time as a cooperating teacher and then maybe write a grant. I think I can also count my summer trip to Colorado.

#4: Complacent Teacher: Maybe this isn't so bad after all if you can study rocks in Colorado and get credit for it.

Methodology

As the focus of our study, we selected five Ohio school districts located in the western part of the state that varied in size from a district of approximately 4,000 students to one of 26,000 students. The locations of the districts represented rural, suburban, and urban school districts. Two of the districts were part of the state's pilot program, while three districts implemented the state mandate at the required due date. The state's pilot program required districts to create their LPDCs a year prior to the mandatory fall 1998 implementation. The Ohio

Department of Education provided funding up to $50,000 as the incentive for districts to participate in the pilot program. Table 1 shows the demographics of the five participating school districts.

Table 1

Description of the Five School Districts Serving as Participants

School Districts Characteristics	Auckland	Dearborn	Diversity	Target	Verde
Student Population	4,060	5,993	26,000	7,440	4,581
Number of Teachers	193	241	1,700	460	245
Teacher –Years Of Experience	15.5	16	15.3	14.5	16.5
LPDC Pilot District	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
State Funding	Yes	None	Grants	Yes	Yes
Number of IPDPs reviewed	17	43	39	11	23

To answer our research questions, we reviewed the Individual Professional Development Plans of 133 Teachers. We obtained access to the IPDPs by asking the key informant for each site, the individuals we had interviewed in our previous study, for permission to view their IPDPs.

Of the 133 IPDPS reviewed, most were Elementary Teachers. In totality, our review included 115 Elementary Teachers, nine Secondary English Teachers, and nine Secondary Mathematics Teachers. For each of these teachers, we simply noted the type of PD activity they

planned to pursue. For example, consider an Elementary Teacher who, in the next five years, planned to pursue seven different professional development options. Table 2 shows how each separate activity was coded as a single entry in one of the professional development categories.

Table 2

Coding of Professional Development Options

Professional Development Activity	PD Category
Enrolling in a college course on Using Computers in the Elementary Classroom	Course work
Writing a grant to obtain classroom materials	Grant writing
Attending upcoming district in-services	Workshop/Conference/In-service
Attending a statewide conference on Literacy	Workshop/Conference/In-service
Serving on a building committee such as the Technology Committee	Committee work
Improving lessons to reflect higher-level questioning	In-Class activity
Serving on a district committee such as the Language Arts K –12 Curriculum Committee	Committee work

It is important to note that if teachers indicated that they were pursuing a Master's Degree, we coded that as a separate category since teachers did not indicate the individual courses they would be taking in pursuit of that degree. Other patterns emerged as we coded the data. For example, we identified a separate category within the course work category for course work that appeared to be unrelated to the teacher's certificated area or classroom teaching assignment. As the example in Table 2 indicates, we also found that teachers were identifying activities that would be defined as normal professional work, such as using specific teaching strategies within the confines of their actual classrooms. For such activities, we created the category "In-Class Activities." These were activities that could have been, but were not, related to outside professional development activities such as professional reading or workshops. Once

the data were coded and placed in their respective categories, we then totaled the number of activities represented by each category. The compiled data across all possible categories are shown in Table 3 in the next section of this paper.

Results

The resultant data show that teachers are still relying heavily on the traditional avenues for professional development: college courses and workshops and/or conferences. The thirteen different options that the 133 teachers selected are shown in Table 3. A category that emerged as we reviewed the data, In-Class Activities, warrants further discussion as the category with the fourth highest frequency. While our research question was to examine three different types of teachers, we found our data to be limited in that such few Secondary English and Math Teachers had completed IPDPs in their respective districts. That is, only nine Secondary English and nine Secondary Mathematics teachers submitted IPDPs at the five sites. However, the trend of Elementary Teachers selecting mostly course work and workshops/conferences as their main source of professional development was a trend that was also maintained by both groups of Secondary Teachers.

Table 3

Activities Selected by Frequency

Activity/Level	Elementary	Sec. English	Sec. Math
1. Course Work (in teaching area)	75	10	3
Masters Degree (in t`ing area)	17	2	0
Course Work (outside t` ing area)	5	3	7
Masters Degree (outside t`ing area)	12	0	3
2. Conferences/Workshops/ In-Service	96	5	7
3. Professional Reading/ Study Groups	19	1	0
4. In-Class Activities	17	0	1
5. Committee Work	11	4	1
6. Teaching a Class	8	2	6
7. Peer Observation	9	2	0
8. Educational Travel	2	0	0
9. Cooperating Teacher/	8	4	2
10. Mentoring	3	1	0
11. National Board	2	2	0
12. Portofolio Work	5	1	0
13. Externship	4	0	0

Both Elementary Teachers and Secondary Math Teachers indicated, in 17 and ten different instances, that they would be pursuing course work and/or Master's Degrees that were outside of their respective teaching areas. Only three Secondary English teachers indicated that they would be pursuing course work outside of their teaching area.

Many teachers were vague in describing their professional development intentions However, for those teachers who gave specific information regarding their intentions, we noted these intentions We found that out of all the different types of course work elementary teachers were pursuing, 16 of the courses or master's degree programs were related to Literacy Imbedded within these intentions were concerns for raising student achievement as measured by the Ohio Proficiency Test In the area of Conferences/In-Service/Workshops, thirteen of the Elementary Teachers indicated a preference for sessions related to Literacy As teachers identified areas of research in the category of Professional Reading, eleven teachers identified Literacy as an area of study

Math activities were broadly defined as math methods, use of technology, and science and math integration As teachers listed course work as a professional development option, 20 listed such activities as ones they were planned to pursue For conferences, workshops, and in-service activities, 26 different math activities were named Three math topics were named as subjects to pursue in the category of professional reading They selected activities where they could learn how to use manipulatives, develop hands-on math problems, or learn how to apply technology in the math classroom Secondary math teachers indicated a primary focus on receiving an advanced degree in technology Therefore, as we looked at the types of content-specific activities selected by teachers, the data show that, among the specifics noted across course work, workshops/conferences, and professional reading activities, teachers identified Literacy activities 40 times while selecting math-related activities 49 times

Since the IPDPS of most teachers were quite vague in nature, we failed to learn enough about the specific types of learning teachers are pursuing in Literacy and mathematics As more

teachers complete IPDPs in the coming years, perhaps we will be able to glean more information about the types of content pedagogy being pursued.

The results were significant, we believe, in showing that teachers are making some attempts to take advantage of this new approach to professional development activities. That is, for the 133 IPDPs we reviewed, the following nine options were named for a total of 71 different times: committee work, teaching a class outside of their classroom assignment, peer observations, educational travel, serving as a cooperating teacher, mentoring a new teacher, vying for National Board Certification, portfolio work, and externship.

Lastly, as shown previously in Table 1, the school district with the second lowest number of teachers submitted the highest number of IPDPs for review. We learned that the reason for this high number is that they were requiring all teachers to complete IPDPs irrespective of when their current certificate expired. In comparison, the IPDPs from another district showed how teachers were taking advantage of the grace period which enables teachers to renew their certificates under 1987 standards. Such standards permit teachers to reduce the number of hours required for renewal by one semester hour or three continuing education units (CEUs) for each year of successful experience. This former way of granting CEUs is commonly known as the "seat time" rule. Since the main function of the LPDC is to determine if the requirements for renewal of certificates under 1987 standards and requirements for licenses under 1998 standards have been met, we found this variance to be noteworthy in that only one district indicated this in the IPDPs that we reviewed.

Discussion

Economics usually plays a major role in the decision making process, we believe this is a main factor in teachers choosing course work as their main source of professional development activities. At the present time, the only way that most teachers are able to receive raises in salary is by completing more course work. Until teachers are paid and promoted on the basis of what they know, this trend of relying on course work for professional development will probably continue. We recommend that the basis for the acquisition of such knowledge should take on various definitions, definitions that include a much broader picture than the typical course work and workshop-type options. In other words, we believe that the types of professional development that are recognized by Local Professional Development Committees will only become a more prevailing force when it becomes recognized by the pay scale that determines teachers' salaries. Perhaps bargaining units for teachers will heed this consideration when negotiating pay raises for their teachers.

As our earlier search indicated, wide differences exist in the way districts are approaching the newly defined professional development. The Ohio Department of Education very clearly stated that "the identified goals and strategies are relevant to the needs of the district, the school, the students, and the educator" (ODE, 1996, p. 18). While some districts were more diligent than others in ensuring that all four outcomes were met, some districts did not ensure that the four aforementioned goals were met. We believe that districts can come closer to meeting their goals if they are overtly articulated to their teachers during the IPDP process. For example, in one district where the use of technology was a district goal, some teachers selected technology from the list of district goals that was provided to them during the IPDP process. Therefore, we would recommend that, since the intent of the mandate is for teachers to connect their

professional development goals to the four outcomes, the LPDC's should uniformly adopt some type of form by which teachers must show a direct connection for how IPDPs are addressing all four outcomes. Similarly, if school districts and school buildings are finding that their teachers are not pursuing the types of professional development that they believe are necessary for improvement, they would be wise to consider a reformulation of goals that could serve as guiding forces for teachers' choices of professional development activities.

As we reviewed the professional development the teachers selected, we could not understand why teachers were justified in counting hours spent during their contractural teaching team as professional development hours. While we applaud their desire to change and improve some of their daily interactions with students, we found it odd that they would consider such efforts to be professional development. Even stranger was that such efforts would gain approval from a LPDC. If such efforts in the classroom are direct results of professional reading or the completion of course work, then we believe that the goal of professional development has been accomplished. However, while the time spent conducting professional reading or attending classes is clearly outside the daily duties of a teacher, the time spent in the classroom applying such newly gained knowledge is, simply, put, doing one's job. We recommend that the Ohio Department of Education should make it very clear that in-class activities should not be counted as professional development hours.

As the data show, we found that teachers were pursuing activities that were, in our opinion, outside of their teaching field. In describing the IPDP, the Ohio Department of Education (1998) states, "Each required professional development that is completed must be clearly related to the area of licensure and/or classroom teaching" (p. 18). Apparently, teachers were approved because they could make a case for showing how a class in supervision or

leadership could apply to their daily interactions with students. This, however, begs the question: Why would LPDCs approve professional development that is geared toward enabling the teacher to gain a credential that will take them out of the classroom versus gaining knowledge that can be linked with students' needs and the strategic plans of school buildings and school districts?

In closing, we eagerly await a review of more IPDPs in the year 2002 when one of the grace periods by which teachers could avoid the new standards will be over. However, teachers who, prior to 1998, held professional certificates will be able to operate under old standards until the year 2014. Confusing? It certainly is, and we sincerely hope that while such differences exist among districts in how IPDPs are approved and regulated, districts and LPDCs will narrow these differences and continue to work toward improving both the process and the product. If the process can be improved, and we believe our recommendations must be part of this process, then we believe the elusive goal of better teacher preparation is closer to becoming a reality. Better teachers equate with better schools. This is the product for which we all strive.

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